

Renewable Fuels to Become Part of Idaho's Economy

By Michael Keckler, public information officer, Idaho Department of Water Resources

Idaho farmers known for producing one particular “famous” crop will soon be able to add renewable fuels to their repertoire.

Fuel crops like rapeseed, safflower, mustard seed, and canola are all well adapted to Idaho and provide valuable new crops that can be added to rotations. With production facilities for biodiesel and ethanol planned in Idaho Falls, Pocatello, Burley, Heyburn, Buhl, Glenns Ferry, Caldwell, Potlatch and a plant already online in New Plymouth, the market will be strong.

The New Plymouth plant alone produces 10 million gallons of biodiesel a year. At \$3.50 per gallon (about what diesel is currently selling for) that one plant alone will produce a product worth approximately \$35 million a year to Idaho's economy. And consumers will soon find biodiesel available at more than 35 filling stations from Shoshone to Boise and north to Sandpoint.

“Ethanol and biodiesel production is fast becoming one of the most exciting segments of economic development in Idaho and the Pacific northwest,” Idaho Energy Division energy specialist John Crockett said. “Crops grown here produce feedstock for biofuels that are superior to crops grown in any other place in the nation. We are close to major liquid fuel markets and our large cattle and dairy industries provide an excellent market for the byproducts.”

Crockett says thousands of railcars travel into the state each year bringing feed for Idaho's cattle industry; feed that could be produced right here in Idaho as a byproduct of ethanol and biodiesel plants.

Renewable fuels are also a key component in preserving air quality. Last week, Senator Mike Crapo joined several southwestern Idaho mayors and state leaders including Water Resources director Karl Dreher to celebrate the federal designation of the Treasure Valley Clean Cities Coalition. What does that mean for the rest of Idaho?

The Clean Cities program promotes the use of renewable fuels to improve the environment and to make us less dependant on foreign oil. The program promotes Idaho grown and refined fuels both here and across the country.

Nearly 20-years ago, the Idaho Energy Division and the University of Idaho entered into a partnership that resulted in the University being recognized as a worldwide pioneer and leader in renewable fuels research.

Today, that partnership is beginning to pay off with new crops and markets for Idaho farmers, better air quality in our urban areas, and an improved environment throughout the state. And maybe in some small way, the partnership will eventually contribute to our nation's energy security.